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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experience of two children, native-speakers of Hebrew, in a language center in England. The language center provides a total immersion program in English for a multi-lingual population of children aged 5 to 12 years. The small-group and individualized instruction, the instructional materials and facilities, and the close attention of the teachers contribute to a favorable learning atmosphere. Another advantage of the center is the elimination of feelings of inferiority. The older child, aged 10, spent one year in the center; the other, aged 8, spent a year and a half there before going into a regular school program. The following aspects of their language study are briefly discussed: (1) the center's method of teaching the English sound system, grammar and vocabulary; (2) the children's progress in learning the language; and (3) three tests given to the children to check their linguistic competence one year after they left the center. One conclusion drawn is that the favorable learning atmosphere at the center and "full immersion" in the environment contributed to the rapid learning of English by the two children. (AMH)

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A Method for Teaching English as Second Language and its Evaluation.

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Abstract.

The study describes some aspects of the process of acquiring the English language, mainly its spoken aspect, by school-aged children who arrive in England practically without any knowledge of the language. Acquiring a new language by normal children is usually a very rapid process. It is interesting to note the stages of the process, as well as investigate the mistakes in the speech of such children, both from theoretic considerations and from the practical aspect of assisting children to eliminate mistakes and overcome obstacles in their communication with their new environment.

As subjects for the study served mainly two children (the author's), a girl (10) and a boy (8) at the time, as well as some of their friends in the "language centre" at Abbeydale Middle School, Sheffield. A description of the teaching methods and facilities at the especially encouraging school atmosphere is also given.

1. Introduction.

English, being a major communication means for numerous cultural and economical needs in society, is taught in many countries as a second language for pupils of varying ages. In Britain the problem of learning English as second language exists for many children who come with their families, for longer or shorter periods, from foreign countries. For these children the need to learn the language is not only a preparation for future contacts with the language and with its speakers, but a real-life and immediate problem for their present communication in the new environment. At school- age they have further difficulty in the fact that they have to be able to use the language at the same level as their school mates (a very much higher level than that of a baby's when he is learning English as the mother-tongue). It is well-known that children usually learn languages easily and quickly, and it is believed that this is so because their mental maturation and lateralisation is not terminated yet (see [10]). However, much depends on the individual's psychological and social background and abilities and on his keenness to learn.

The two types of language learning mentioned above can be distinguished in the purposes and methods of each type: students of group (a) learn the second language while using the primary mother tongue for general usage in society. For them the second language is almost always inferior to the mother-tongue not only

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from the point of view of their achievements but also from their psychological attitude to the language. Students of group (b) usually belong to a minority community who want, or have, to integrate in a majority society with a different language to their own. Therefore, for them the second language seems a desired goal (perhaps a little "snobbish" behavior), and they usually do the utmost to acquire it well and quickly. This attitude sometimes leads to neglection or partial forgetting of the mother tongues. Students of group (a) usually learn the second language only a limited hours per week in school; students of group (b) dedicate to the learning process many more hours, even to what is usually called "full immersion". Usually in neither case the result is pure bilingualism, for one of the two languages is preferred not only in usage but also psychologically.

In Britain, French is usually taught in schools as a second language for group (a) pupils. For group (b) children, there are some "language centres" which are usually attached to ordinary state-schools (primary and middle schools). Such a language centre, one of the four in Sheffield, is described here, its structure, syllabus and advantages. Some features of the language acquisition by the two subjects (the author's children) who attended this school are also described.

2. The Language Centre, its Structure and Work.

The school is a part of Abbeydale Primary and Middle School, but has its autonomy within that framework, with its head, staff and a separate building. There are three groups of children (classes), usually grouped according to age: the youngest children are between 5 - 7 years of age, the middle group, where children between 8 - 10 years of age sit; and the group for the oldest children between 10 - 12 years. A child usually begins to learn with his age group, but if he does well, he can advance to a group above his age-level, where the demand on him is greater and the progress is quicker to a higher level of knowledge. Thus individual ability is a very important factor in the rate of progress. Each group has a teacher who takes up most of the teaching hours, so that she has a good appraisal of the child's ability and achievements. The groups themselves are comfortably small (up to 15 children per group), so that the techer's guidance is very close. The teachers speak to the children only in English, even to those who are entirely new, so that the children are fully immersed in English from 9a.m. to 3 p.m., five days a week.

The children in the language centre come from many countries. At the time the subjects studied there, there were children from Japan, Argentina, Algiers, Saudia, Pakistan Hong-Kong and Israel. Thus only English could serve as the language for communication amongst them. In breaks they were surrounded by other English speaking children, another factor to motivate them towards the language.

The whole atmosphere at the school is happy, and anything everywhere is delightfully decorated by children's and teachers' works. Besides school-books there are also many educational games ready for the dilligent children who finish their work before break or for play on wet days, when the children cannot go out on breaks. All these contribute to rouse the children's interest in school and school-work.

The syllabus at the school combined all the aspects of language structure in pedagogically arranged language-learning books, which are also usually illustated by pictures. To encourage work, individual- and group "stars" were given. The major books for individual excercises were: "The Essential Spelling List" by F.J. Schonell, combined with his "Word Fun 1" and for the higher level "I Know the Answer-Essential Read-Spell;" "Reading to Some Purpose" served for a different type of text understanding and learning practice. Individual creative work was the writing of little stories by pictures which the child himself draws or commenting about pictures glued to a scrap-book. The children had also time for silent reading in books from the "ladybird Series", progressing in vocabulary and structures from single words to long stories. The teacher checked their progress, by each child reading to her individually aloud when he finished a book. A more passive aspect of learning was involved in the stories which the teacher read to the whole group at certain times, thus enriching their vocabulary while explaining new words by paraphrases. Children's T.V. programmes, with emphasis on language learning, were also a regular part of the syllabus. Spoken English had a special allotted time in a lesson which was run with the aid of a book called "Learn to Speak by Speaking", and was excercised by dramatised conversations besides the usual written work. Calligraphy (printed letters and handwriting) was also gradually learnt. In addition, the children had lessons in mathematics to the level of the same age in state-schools and in individual rate of progress, some science, sports and games, music, art and craft and cooking. These subjects provided different vocabulary domains for the children, besides other pedagogical benefits.

To sum up this section, we see, that learning in a language centre may provide the children with advantegeous framework for the language studies, because of the well-directed work, the close attention of the teachers, and the good facilities, conditions and atmosphere there - all of which contribute to increase the child's motivation for learning the language and possibilities to actually do it.

3. Some Feature of the Language Acquisition by A. and I.

The girl, A., was 10 years old when she started her studies at the language centre, and I., the boy, was 8 then. The girl had learnt English for a year in Israel previously to her coming to Britain, by the"group(a) method" if we may call it like that, so that she knew on arrival in Britain the alphabeth (which is different from the Hebrew one), and a few basic words and sentence patterns were not entirely foreign to her, namely simple indicative sentences, negation and questions, equational sentences , possession by the verb 'have' adjective-head word order, personal pronouns etc. The boy had not learnt English at school before, and had only little English taught at home, much less than the girl. They started learning in an ordinary state-school at the beginning of the year, but soon it was felt that the teachers there could not devote to them sufficient time for leaning the language properly, and after a term they were referred to the language centre at Abbeydale School. After one term there, A. returned to her former school and had no problems in coping with the everyday school-work or communication with her class-mates and teachers. I., being younger than A., was in the first term at the language centre in the group of children of his age, and in the second term was 'promoted' the the group of the older (and more advanced) children. When the next school year started, he had no problem in an ordinary school with children of his age (in London). Both A. and I. were during the second year of their stay in England in the top quarter of their classes, which means that they had overcome their language problems.

From the aspect of everyday oral communication, they were chatting away in English even at home since about a month's stay in the language centre, with an ever-growing vocabulary, and even dreaming in English. With A., English has rejected the use of Hebrew almost entirely while she was in England, and she usually answered in English even if spoken to in Hebrew, or reverted to English after a few words (not necessarily a full sentence) in Hebrew. I.'s use of English has been more consciously controlled in comparison with A.'s use of the language, and Hebrew was used by him more freely even in England. This description demonstrates the effects of "full immersion" plus the environment of the language centre. The advantage in the case of studying the language in a language centre is that the children find themselves in a competition for studying the language without inferiority complexes that result of being in a society with superior knowledge of the language.

The period of the basic language acquisition was actually very short, although it cannot be said to have stopped even now. As this period (of staying in the language centre) ended, the following linguistic points could be summarised:

a. The Phonetic System.

The phonemes which were acquired most quickly were those that are also acquired earliest by English babies[1] and also such as are the same or at least similar to Hebrew phonemes - namely the consonants /b, d, f, g, h, k, m, n, p, t, s, š/. Some phonemes that do not belong to the Hebrew phonetic system proper, but are known to Hebrew speakers from contact with other languages did not form any problem for the children; these phonemes were/ž, w, č, ǰ/. The phonemes /r/and "dark /l/", which are differently performed in Hebrew as well as /θ, ð /, which do not exist at all in Modern Colloquial Hebrew, were mastered last (if at all - in I.'s speech /ð/ and 'dark'/l/ are still not well established).

As to the vowel system, the English one has more phonemes than the Hebrew one, The Hebrew vowels are articulated at farther (and perhaps more distinct) points, and the English phonemes are set at closer positions. Becuase of these basic differences, a rather long time passed until the English distinctions were well pronounced in such pairs as bad/bed, saw/no/tomorrow. Fig. 1 demonstrates the differences between the Hebrew and English vowel systems. The schematic Fig. also shows the bigger number of diphthongs in English in comparison with the Hebrew system. These were not acquired quickly when they were combined with those vowels that do not exist in Hebrew, e.g., /iə, ɛʌ, ɛou/.

English vowel quality depends much upon its consonantal environment and the word's syllabic structure, e.g., length of vowels is usually attached to differences in articulation points .(In Hebrew the system is different, in this respect too.) In the language centre, similarly written and pronounced words were learnt in groups to get the children used to these features. Besides learning the words and their spelling and pronunciations, the children also have become more conscious of rhyme in English than in Hebrew.

Word stress and intonation patterns were learnt by imitation, without any conscious instruction - in a lesson such as "learn to speak by speaking", the teacher always read the text first and then the children repeated it as best as they could, but no other lesson dealt with the subject explicitly. Still, inotnationwas learnt together with the sentence patterns, it would seem, and even fine distinctions can be found in A.'s speech (feminine-snobbish, sometimes). Actually, in her speech the English phonetic system dominated even her Hebrew speech , e.g., in the aspirated nature of the phonemes /d^h, t^h, p^h/ or the presence of /ɔ / instead of /o/, and some intonation patterns. I'.s phonetic system has remained mainly Hebrew-oriented, although his word-stress and intonation patterns and rhythm in English are standard English ones.

1. See [3].

b. The Grammar.

The morphological and syntactic systems were gradually acquired, through much excercising and unconscious absorption of the English in the environment. Many elements were learnt along with the semantic values of certain fixed expressions, e.g., "good morning", "good boy" demonstrated and facilitated the learning of the fact that in English an adjective usually precedes its headword (in Hebrew the word order is reversed). Those elements which did not have a parallel in Hebrew formed a greater problem to acquire (quite as would be expected). Thus, for instance, the indefinite article (a/an) took rather a long time to become regularised (even a year after the first learning period it is still forgotten , sometimes). The definite article (the) was, however, quickly learnt. Pluralizing morphemes were quickly learnt, with the irregular ones learnt by heart as separate lexical items. (In Hebrew there are two pluralizing morphemes, for masculine and feminine nouns, and some irregularities, too, so that the concept was not entirely new). Personal pronouns of the subject were learnt more quickly than the accusative and possessive pronouns, perhaps because of the difference between the independent status of the latter two groups (considered as words) in English and their dependent status in Hebrew (there they are suffixed to nouns or verbs). It may be that differences in frequencies of usage between the three groups of pronouns contribute also to the different rates of memorization of the various items, but the above assumption seems not less plausible. The relative pronouns were learnt by excercises, but some of them had a shorter period of acquisition than others, perhaps for the same reasons as mentioned above in relation with the pronoun paradigms.

As to the verbal system, it was first learnt through simple commands such as "come here", "sit down". Then the present tense was learnt through equational sentences , so that the pattern "be + verb+ing" was rather easily acquired after "be + adjective". This "durative" aspect of the English verbal system usually causes many difficulties to the average Israeli pupil, for Hebrew lacks it, but not in the case of A. and I. The third-person 's' of the present simple tense was not too difficult to remember for the children, who are used to more distinctions in Hebrew personal endings, although the nature of the suffixes is different in either language. The past-tense suffixes and the irregular forms had to be laboriously memorised, and there were bound to be mistakes (false analogies). The 'perfect' forms were sometimes used without actually using the auxilliary verb, because it is often slurred in colloquial speech. In addition, the grammatical-semantic distinction between the perfect and other tenses is still not clearly defined in their minds, and they tend to over-use the perfect even when it is not required. Perhaps tenses were not sufficiently excercised. Special problems were

involved in the patterns of negation and interrogation, which use auxilliary verbs and inversion (in interrogation), for Hebrew does not apply such means for these functions. Typical mistakes were e.g., "did he found" and "I did not found". The passive transformation was studied almost at the end of the period at the school. Other special syntactic structures, such as conditional sentences, were not learnt systematically, however, though double accusatives were practised.

From a generalising view-point of all these details it can be deduced, that the actual process of learning the language was made up of two sides: one that can be called "natural", and resembles that of a baby when it learns its mother-tongue, in that it mixes forms and meanings for certain situations; and the second one is the "artificial" method, by consciously learning new moulds and items and using them for "theoretical occasions", if written excercises can be called so. The types of mistakes the children did during that period also resembled in many ways the infants' "trial and error" methods, although on the whole, the total period of acquisition was much shorter than that of a baby's language acquisition.

c. The Vocabulary.

The vocabulary is perhaps the most important part in language - it forms the building blocks for communication. The basic words that enable some sort of communication include a few closed groups of pronouns(personal, demonstrative, relative and numerals), as well as some nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs which denote rather concrete objects, features and actions. The learning activity in this domain as in others, was directed in the language centre from the easy to the harder. In terms of words it could be seen that monosyllabic words were excercised before words with two syllables etc. The words were always learnt in context - stories, songs, poems, reading passages etc., to facilitate both basic absorption and memorising, although dictations from spelling lists were also used. A very important part in making the acquired vocabulary actively usable was played by the story-book and later the scrap-book, where the child expressed his thoughts about pictures he drew or cut and glued in his book. It is possible to follow the child's progress by his book. In the beginning it is the teacher's handwriting that describes the picture and he copies the teacher's words. Gradually the child writes more sentences to describe the pictures, and they are also more complex from grammatical and lexical aspects, although not systematically, of course. Number (singular/plural), numbers, various prepositions, names of colours, names of animals, body members, verbs in different tenses (mainly in the present, though), adjectives and adverbs appear and reflect the domains which the child can already use. We find in I.'s book for example the words: 'pretend, belong, drive, bumpy, up-hill, jumper, fast, through' and 'is going to give' which are beyond the elementary level of communication

and sometimes reflect expressions in spoken English! The fact that the children were in an English-speaking environment (even the T.V. at home functions in English), that is to say, were fully immersed in the language, was perhaps the main catalisator in the rapid learning of a very big vocabulary which they had to actually use. It has also become clear that certain expressions were learnt as complete "formulas"; e.g., simple one-word utterances such as "hellow" or "pardon", and more complex ones such as "it's playtime", "don't you dare", "I beg your pardon", "could we help", "no swimming today", "five fives are twenty five". Thus grammatical structures combined with semantic items were learnt orally even before systematic formal teaching of those items and categories was done. (See also p. 6 above.)

4. Linguistics Competence of the Children a Year after the Language Centre.

For the present paper a few "tests" were given to I. and A. to check their linguistic competence a year after leaving the language centre and integration in an ordinary school. These tests investigated their reactions and attitudes to English and to their mother tongues, Hebrew, applying various methods reported in literature.

The first test checked their verbal reactions to lexical stimuli in Hebrew and English. 70 words were said to each child separately, half of which in English and half in Hebrew, and the oral reaction to these words was noted in writing. This test showed differences in the reactions: I. tended to use direct translation as a reaction to a word (English or Hebrew) while A. tended to a more associative reaction, without so much dependence on literal translation. Another interesting result was that both children used more rhyming words as responses to words in English than to words in Hebrew. This may be due to the training method at the language centre, as mentioned above (section 3-a). Table 1 demonstrated the results.

identical response		different linguistic means of response		
I. and A.		means	I.	A.
translation from Hebrew	5	translation	50	16
		rhyming	14(English)	19 (2 Hebrew)
translation from English	4	antonyms	2	10
English synonyms	2	associated	4	22
		different		3
Total	11	total	70	70

Table 1. Responses of I. and A. to 35 words in Hebrew and 35 words in English.

Another test checked the children's free expression of their thoughts. They were asked to tell any story in English and in Hebrew, without hearing one another. I. told in English a fiction story which he had once heard. His speech was fluent, without hesitations and without grammar mistakes. A. told in English the story "Red Riding Hood". Her speech elaborated more English expressions and intonation patterns, but she had some hesitations as to the choice of words and sentences (related more to planning the story than to knowledge of the language). She also had some grammar mistakes, such as "which" instead of "who". Next I. told the same story in Hebrew. His version was fluent, although he, too, had some trouble organising the sequence of actions. A. told then the same story in Hebrew with good fluency , for she repeated her English version in an almost literal translation. Her phonetic system was, in contrast with I.'s, very influenced in Hebrew from the English one (for example: the Hebrew 'béten' (stomach) was pronounced as 'betn', perhaps in analogy to English words such as "button" or "pattern"). As soon as she finished the story in Hebrew , she switched to English; I., too, made a comment in English after his Hebrew story.

The third test checked the response of the children to questions, first in Hebrew, then in English and at last in randomly ordered English and Hebrew questions. The questions required partly short answers, and partly required some reflection and fuller answers. The reults are tabulated in Table 2 as follows:

Questions:	Hebrew		English		random English and Hebrew			
Answers:	Hebrew	English	Hebrew	English	for Hebrew Hebrew	English	for English Hebrew	English
I.	6	4	-	10	3	3	1	3
A.	3	7	-	10	1	3	½	5½[2]

Table 2. Reaction-language to 30 questions in Hebrew and English (I. and A.)

Short and insufficient though this test may be, it still shows the same tendency of A.'s to use English more than Hebrew, while I. is still more responsive to stimuli in Hebrew.

A different kind of test was to let the children write down within five minutes all the words that came into their minds after a stimulus-word in Hebrew. This was repeated three times. The three trials gave different results as can be seen in Table 3.

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2. One answer to a question (enumerate a few flower-names) was started in English and was continued in Hebrew; this explains the "½" scores.

Child	1st try		2nd try		3rd try		
	Heb.	Eng.	Heb.	Eng.	Heb.	Eng.	
I.	8	22	1	37	-	38	(+8 French)
A.	11	19	10	28[3]	2	30	(+4 French)

total	Hebrew	English	total
I.	9	97	106 (+8)
A.	23	77	100 (+4)

Table 3. Number of Hebrew and English words during three 5-minutes periods

The results of this test show the tendency to use more English and less Hebrew, growing from the first test to the last, besides the few French words, which are not directly related to the present subject.

The last test checked the children's responses to mixed (random Hebrew and English) word-stimuli. For 10 Hebrew and 10 English words I. came up with (wrote down) no Hebrew word, and A. had only one word. The first 4 Hebrew words were directly translated into English by both children, and the last 4 in Hebrew had associative responses in English. A.'s Hebrew word was a translation of the English one. (As a matter of fact, it followed a Hebrew word that was translated into English). However, the results of this test may have been influenced by the previous one, which preceded the last one without a long period of rest between them.

If we compare the results of all these tests, we can see that A. "lives" more in English than I. and also has a better control of both Hebrew and English than he has. The reasons that may be behind this difference are perhaps age, attitude and even longer learning period: the older of the two has had a longer period of learning the language (if we consider the preparatory year in Israel); she has a more serious attitude to studying, which can be deduced from her dilligence in school-work also besides English; she is also a more pedantic person in other ways, too, compared with I. All these factors seem to have combined to yield her better performance in English, which probably represent better mastery of the language than the boy's.

5. Discussion.

The subject of a second language acquisition interests educators, linguists, psychologists and neurologists among others. Theories that are considered somewhat "traditional" claim that age is the factor that forms

3. In this try her answers used a systematic list in Hebrew and English of some subjects learnt at school (the stimulus word was "mathematics".)

the major difference in the achievements of second language acquisition by children compared with adults. This age factor is linked with the changes that take place in the brain's functioning(as it matures in time), for it is known that certain areas in the brain assume fixed functions.

It is believed now that a few other elements contribute to facilitate the process of acquiring a second language, by either children or adults: the attitude (motivation), the time devoted to actual learning, and the method of learning. See [1 - 12] for various aspects of research on this subject.

The advantages of second language learning by children or adults in comparison with infants who learn their first language can be found in the fact that the older children (or adults) can exploit their developed skills as well as the infants' learning methods for an efficient result. Imitation of phonemes was less difficult for the children in the "language centre" than for an infant, because their speech organs are already trained for this function; grammatical categories of the first language serve as some basis for comparison and contrast, while learning the second language, and this is more than an infant has when he starts learning his first language. Lexical items were learnt much more quickly, than infants would learn them, because the older children's memory is more trained than the infants' and they can skip many perceptive difficulties which an infant cannot.

Besides these advantages, the fact that the children were in an English speaking society forced them to get used to think creatively in this language, and not only to listen passively to the teacher or learn the language by mechanical excercises without real motivation.

Further advantage was the fact that the children were in a place where they had good professional guidance for the learning process as well as a society of children who were in the same position basically (lack of knowledge of the language), and thus they gained self-confidence very quickly, and "dared" use the language even with their mistakes. The school uses, as we have seen, both the "natural" teaching methods, as intuitively used by parents to their infants all over the world - i.e., by emphasising contextual meaning and performance of tasks more than small items of detail- and the conscious acquisition of patterns, categories and details by formalised drilling.

From the checking of the language competence of the subjects of the present paper it is possible to observe personal differences between I. and A., in spite of the similar background they had. (A.'s year of English in Israel may have had to do with it, as mentioned above). Fathman (3) classified her subjects to two groups according to age, namely 6 - 10, and 11 - 15. The present study may imply that even within the younger group there may be differences of achievements due to age differences, and perhaps also sex differences, which are involved with maturation.

6. Summary.

The present paper has dealt with the language problems of children who come to England (or for that matter, to any community who speaks a different language to their own) from abroad, and with one of the quickest and most useful ways of teaching the language. The problems mentioned here were mainly technically discussed in terms of phonetic, grammatical and lexical difficulties during the acquisition of the second language. As a "case study" served for us the comparison between Hebrew-native-speakers and English as the second language. Differences of competence and performance have been found between the two subjects; these differences may be attributed to personal differences of character, as well as to age and perhaps also sex, and actual duration of the language acquisition stage. These differences have been found by some "psycho-linguistic" tests.

As an evaluation of the second-language-teaching-method as found at the "language centre", where the two subjects studied the language with many other children, it can be said that this kind of school provides a good framework for the acquisition of the language. It functions with the combination of both "full immersion" in the environment (which is new to the children) and the "formal" school-teaching (pedagogically arranged material).[4] It also encourages the children psychologically in many ways, such as rousing their interest and motivation as well as certain competitions and rewards - all of which undoubtedly contribute to the rapid progress of the children. For them, language acquisition turns from a mere school-subject into an exciting social and cultural experience, and this is what seems to be most important about languages.

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4. As a matter of fact, a similar approach is applied in Israel for adults' linguistic adaptation to Hebrew. New-comers who do not know the language usually stay for six months in language centres ("ulpanim") where they learn Hebrew practically all day long.

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